

The Plays and The Players

Interesting Plays Always the Result of Growth and Change

Reversing the Sequence of Acts in 'The Varying Shore,' Miss Zoe Akins's New Drama, Not the First Time Experiment Has Been Tried.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THERE is still a new change in the outline of "The Varying Shore" at the Hudson Theater. So long as Miss Ferguson does not alter, the public may visit the playhouse without apprehension. Miss Ferguson's participation in Miss Zoe Akins's play is in reality a species of beauty show. It seemed at the first representation as if there could be nothing lovelier than her incarnation of the Southern woman in the ripe beauty of her early forties.

The quaint costume of the Second Empire added a touch of exotic remoteness to this exquisitely womanly and tender apparition, staring with rather tearful eyes from under her crescent shaped tiara at a world which might have devoured her but for this appealing femininity which no man could ever resist or ever harden his heart toward. Her "friend" attributed her safety on a certain niveau of decency to the suggestion of "class" that still hung about her. It seems more probable that this irresistible sense of dependence did more for her than anything else during a career that was just about as long as it was shameless.

For the heroine of "The Varying Shore" had so far as the world saw none but the fruits of iniquity. There was no thorn in her path. In the old days when there was a possibility of impropriety in anything but bedroom farces, the prudes would have landed heavily on the play at the Hudson Theater. The courtesan who died in the odor of sanctity, apparently altogether forgiven and her sins quite forgotten, was in the old days anathema to the scrupulous. She had to suffer, be made ridiculous or miserable or painlessly removed from the scenes of this earth to deserve the forgiveness of the pious. It is true that Miss Akins's *Julie Leland* appears to have been rather ridiculous during her late Riviera period. But she enjoyed every minute of life.

So would she be, according to the old standards, quite unforgivable. But there are no old standards, and *Julie* deserves to be pardoned for the sake of Miss Ferguson's beauty if for no other reason. If she seemed at her loveliest dragging about the train of the Second Empire gown of the late sixties, it was only because one had not seen her in the riding habit which the riant young womanhood of the earlier period assumed for the sports of the farm near New York.

Yet it was, after all, mistaken to declare her then of an unsurpassable beauty of person and altogether incomparable in the charm of her bearing. Still, there remained the picture of hesitating and tremulous girlhood. Miss Akins can begin her play when and where she will, stop it at the beginning or in the middle and consult only her own untrammelled will in its arrangement. It is only imperative that she obscure no minute of the three phases of such varied and unique loveliness as Miss Ferguson so triumphantly displays.

Miss Akins's Merits.

There is so much originality in Miss Akins's separate scenes and so much distinction in the way that they are usually written, it is regrettable to think that these qualities must be attained at the cost of the technical mastery which would reveal them at their best. So many of her dramatic problems are adroitly solved.

The gift of *Julie's* pearls, for instance, that her bankrupt lover may not be dishonored when he cannot pay a gambling debt to a young woman of the same loose kind as herself, but not nearly so deserving of them and the safety their possession implies; and the intrusion of the drunken Englishman just as her lover had determined to make an earnest effort to forget what she had been and marry her—these episodes reveal what dramatic expedients Miss Akins can invent for the details of her scenes, even if the general effective plan of a piece escapes her entirely.

Then, there is real distinction in so much of her dialogue—not, of course, the deplorable fine writing which tries to sound like everything in the world but fails, but genuinely characteristic speech that defers to good taste and a working knowledge of the language.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that the conversion of the last act of "The Varying Shore" into the first may have the same effect that such a transformation had in the case of a successful play of twenty or more years ago. Marguerite Merrington, who made no subsequent attempt to enroll her name among the great playwrights, wrote "Captain Letterblair," which served E. H. Sothern most profitably during some of the younger seasons of his career. Miss Merrington, who was an accomplished woman and a well known educator, first submitted her play to Joseph Jefferson for practical suggestions. He urged that the last act be written and she took that advice for the first. She took that advice for the undying delight of herself and Mr. Sothern. That change may not have made all the success of "Captain Letterblair." Yet the fact ought to encourage Miss Akins.

Result of Prevailing Slackness.

Undoubtedly there will be after the winter's leanness in success a greater respect on the part of the managers for the skill of the experienced playwright. The revivals of two notable dramas of the last decade have served to make one thing clear. No author with a story to recite need begin it forty years after the death of the great-aunt of the heroine or tell it backward or sideways or in any other fashion than that of the straightaway story teller with something to relate. All the sliding backward and forward, departing to the right or the left, or telling stories in any other way than they could possibly have been expected to be told—these are but evasions. They are efforts to get around the simple fact that the playwright has nothing to say and hopes by these oblique methods to deceive the spectators into the belief that there is a real bit of fiction before their eyes.

This discouraging novelty acquired its popularity before popular dramas like "Bought and Paid For" and "Alias Jimmy Valentine" were written. Of course there is nothing in these two efforts to excite the enthusiasm of the so-called "high brow" or even the most lukewarm of his colleagues. But both are serviceable and effective stories told in the idiom of the theater. Managers are going to respect output of this kind more than ever after the extravagant and erring manner of the dramatists this year. This has not been the tendency of

their recent conduct. If one eccentricity flashed in the pan, it was not the course of the manager to seek a return to normalcy. He sought out, on the other hand, something if possible more unusual. He had not failed because he had sought to satisfy his public with something bizarre, but because what he ultimately found was not bizarre enough. So the hunt for the outlandish went on.

Then the strike came—the strike of the public—and there was no more confidence in the playwright who could devise all sorts of odd and out of the way methods of saying nothing that had not been much better said before.

Cherish the Playwright.

So the playwright now seems destined to be more prized than ever by the manager. What a revelation it would be to hear the real story of some of the plays which fitness and experience have allowed to depart with a certain appearance of dignity in spite of their real experience! The tragedies of those that disappear at once are plain enough. Who runs may read. One of them was acted five times a few weeks ago and cost the optimistic impresario about \$40,000. What will be the fate, for instance, of such a drama as "The Mountain Man"? Did ever a single play but one in the highly praised Kummer theater ever earn a cent for its manager? Yet after all, there is no reason why a play should be viewed with scorn because it happens to meet a fate that in some degree corresponds to the hopes of the impresario who ported it before the world. William Gillette acted in "The Successful Calamity," which had other advantages above some of Miss Kummer's plays. The rest of them had their quaintly humorous lines, which rarely availed to save them. Audiences smiled for one act and usually felt vaguely restless and homesick for the rest of the time.

Miss Kummer had not been so unconsciously praised for these modest achievements she might have thought it worth while to learn how to write a play. Evidently she thought such a course quite unnecessary, and "The Mountain Man" is convincing evidence of her decision. Miss Akins had better be careful. She may be solicitously "kidded" along for a while by falcon praise in certain quarters until she also believes that what she is writing now has a place in the theater.

Ethel Barrymore and William Gillette are rare, so they are powerful, pillars to tottering dramaturgy. It is not possible, after all, to have such support for every play. Then the wretched inadequacy of the effort is made plain. Theater managers are often compelled to accept material in which they have little confidence. The present season has not been without its educational value, however, in quarters that stood in need of it. The freak playwright will probably find the going harder next year than it has been in many a calcium moon.

Vaudeville To-night for Salesmen's Association

Mr. E. F. Albee, president of the Keith Circuit of Theatres, who originated and sponsored the idea of the testimonial to the National Council of Traveling Salesmen's Associations as a recognition of their efforts in improving traveling conditions, has arranged a varied and interesting program at the Manhattan Opera House to-night, including a number of the most popular Keith stars.

The list includes among others Miss Sophie Tucker, Miss Tride Frizanza, Al Herman, Herman Timberg, Rex Samuels, Joe Cook, A Trip to Hilland, Val and Ernie Stanton, Lewis and Doty, Miss Grace Nelson, Miss Marga Waldron and George Halpern, Tango Shoes, Ben Welch and others. Julius Tannen, conspicuous in vaudeville for many seasons as "The Chatbox," will return to the stage for the occasion, and will act as master of ceremonies. The event will have a bit of "Forget-Me-Not Day" sentiment by the presence of about 1,500 disabled war veterans, who will be present as the guests of the association.



CONCEPTION PIQUER in Spanish Songs and Dances in "The Wild Cat" Park

Miss WINIFRED LENIHAN in "The Dover Road" Bijou Theatre

Miss WILDA BENNETT in "The Music Box Revue" Music Box



H. B. WARNER Who Will Appear in "Danger" 5912 St Theatre

'The Broken Wing' Returns to Brooklyn

"The Broken Wing," new comedy-drama, by Paul Dickey and Charles W. Goddard, comes to the Majestic Theater to-morrow for a return engagement. The scene is laid in Mexico. The cast includes Alphonse Ethier, Eugene Strong, Miss Marguerite Rissler, Albert Sackett and Boris Korlin.

The week before Christmas attraction at the Montauk Theater will be Miss Frances Starr in David Belasco's production of "The Easiest Way," which has already rounded out one week at that theater and begins to-morrow the second and last week of its stay. Miss Belle Baker will head the bill at the Orpheum. Others will be Harry Landson and company, Mrs. Sidney Drew and company, the Marmen Sisters, Ruth Marr and Leo Beers.

The Hanneford family of equestrians, with Poodles, the riding clown, will top the programme at the Shubert-Cramer.

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Bernstein, Gallagher and Deady will present the "Little Bo-Peep" burlesques at the Star, with Harry Pepper and Charles T. Ray.

Frederick Perry Takes Norman Trevor's Role

There appears to be an unwritten and written law, paradoxical it may be, that a dramatic star of a Broadway show would rather take an old fashioned whipping than rehearse once the play has apparently settled down to a long engagement. This may be true in many cases, but it does not apply to Miss Marie Doré, now heading the cast of "Lilies of the Field" at the Klaw Theater.

Norman Trevor has been playing "opposite" Miss Doré since the play opened two months ago. Having decided to produce his own play and making arrangements to get it under way before the holidays, Mr. Trevor withdrew from the William Hurlbut production.

Frederick Perry was engaged and rehearsals were called, with Miss Doré reporting promptly and taking a deep personal interest in the repeating of her lines with Mr. Perry.

"RIGOLETTO" IN BROOKLYN.

The Metropolitan Opera Company will give "Rigoletto" on Tuesday evening at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, with Mrs. Chase, Ferini, Anthony and Mellich and Messrs. Chamblee, Ruffo, Rothler, Bada, Picco, Rachigian and Ananlian, Mr. Papi conducting.



BEN-AMI in "The Idle Inn" Plymouth

Calendar of First Nights

MONDAY.

MANHATTAN OPERA HOUSE—"Alibi or the Truth?" a musical recollection of the world war, will be sponsored by the World War Veterans. It is announced that the proceeds will be used for the aid of destitute ex-service men. The book and lyrics were written by Jude Brayton and Harry Olsen composed the music. The cast includes Miss Edith Thayer, Miss Mary Chippendale, Wakefield and Lyons and Ed Featherstone.

TUESDAY.

PLYMOUTH THEATRE—Arthur Hopkins announces Ben-Ami in "The Idle Inn," by Peretz Hirshbein, first produced at the Jewish Art Theatre. It has been adapted by Isaac Goldberg and Louis Wolheim. In the cast are Miss Eva MacDonald, Miss Mary Shaw, Miss Joanna Roos, Hubert Druce, Whitford Kane and Edward G. Robinson.

THURSDAY.

SHUBERT THEATRE (Morning and Afternoon Performances)—Lillian Owen's Marionettes will begin a series of morning and afternoon performances in Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," dramatized by Hettie Louise Mick, and "Hynd Horn," from an old English folk story. With them will be Miss Rosalind Fuller in old English folk songs and Miss Margaret McKee, girl whistler.

THIRTY-NINTH STREET THEATRE (Evening)—Carle Carlton will present H. B. Warner in Cosmo Hamilton's comedy drama, "Danger!" The star will be supported by Miss Marie Goff, Leslie Howard, Miss Gilda Leary and Miss Ruth Hammond.

FRIDAY.

BIJOU THEATRE (Matinee)—Guthrie McClintic will produce "The Dover Road," light comedy by A. A. Milne, featuring Charles Cherry. The leading woman is Miss Winifred Lenihan, and others are Miss Molly Pearson and Reginald Mason.

NATIONAL THEATRE (Evening)—"Trüby," Paul Potter's dramatization of George du Maurier's famous story, has been selected by the National Players, Inc., as the production with which they will make their bow as a new stock company at popular prices. This group includes Wilton Lackaye, George Nash, Edmund Lowe, Harry Mestayer, Miss Charlotte Walker, Ignacio Martinetti, Joseph Allen, Frank Donane and Jeffreys Lewis.

SATURDAY.

PRINCESS THEATRE—Norman Trevor will make his bow to the American public as an actor-manager with his production of "The Married Woman," by Chester Bailey Fernald, under the direction of the Selwyns. The cast includes Miss Margaret Dale, Miss Beatrice Maude, Grant Stewart and Marsh Allen.

Did You Hear?

About Jeritza's Opera Contract and Haddon Chambers's Last Play.

By LUCIEN CLEVELAND.

IN all probability the glory reflected from the former Imperial Opera House in Vienna will center exclusively about Mme. Jeritza this season. She is enough for any operatic theater to be proud of as an ambassador of its traditions to another country. But when she departs at the end of a few months there will be no body else to carry on the same glories, since it seems certain that Mme. Solna Kurz will not, after all, make another journey to this country.

Giulio Gatti-Casazza gave the famous coloratura soprano of the opera in Vienna a contract by which she was to sing a number of her roles at the Metropolitan. It is probably in view of the fact that she is unwilling to make a concert tour here and feels it too much of an ordeal to undertake the journey for her comparatively brief operatic season that she is to remain in her own country. So Mme. Kurz will remain in Vienna. When she left here early last spring it was with the announcement that if she came back it would be in September in order to accustom herself to the climate before she appeared at the Metropolitan.

"The contract served its purpose admirably whether the singer return here or not," one of her friends said the other day. "Manager Gatti has shown himself courteous and considerate to a distinguished foreigner." Mme. Kurz had the contract with the opera to show as a result of her American concert tour and everybody has been made comfortable by the engagement. So there is no earthly use why the soprano should take the trouble to return.

The "Sally" Calendar.

Flo Ziegfeld, Jr., he is still junior in spite of the gray hair—has about made up his mind to go to the theater to-morrow night. He has decided on the New Amsterdam, although Miss Billie Burke is at Henry Miller's Theater. He is not going to see "Sally" so much as to watch the audience. He wants to see how it will react to his first anniversary. For "Sally" is a year old to-morrow night. Mr. Ziegfeld hopes to be able to tell from the looks of the audience how many more years of her life will be spent at the New Amsterdam Theater. In the meantime he has prepared a "Sally Calendar" for the next year.

These are its chief points: Miss Marilyn Miller has not missed a single performance. Leon Errol was out once on account of tonsillitis. Only one change has been made in the cast since the first night and that was the substitution of Miss Kathleen Martin for Miss Mary Hays. Even every member of the company has the same. Every member of the company will have new costumes for the beginning of the second year of the play. Every seat has been sold for every performance since the first "Sally" to still in London and three companies are touring the British provinces. The piece will be given soon in Berlin, Vienna and Melbourne.

In the box with Mr. Ziegfeld will be the author, Guy Bolton; the composer, Jerome Kern; Clifford Grey and Victor Herbert. It is from this box that Mr. Ziegfeld will make his speech. If everybody listens intently it may be possible to hear Mr. Ziegfeld announce the date on which he will open the New York engagement of the second "Sally" company.

Old Friend's New Face.

Two good stories were told by the speakers at the dinner for David Belasco at the Biltmore Hotel the other night. Channing Pollock related the conversation when William Gillette took George Broadhurst to visit his farm and showed him the inclosure where the goats were kept. One of the animals kicked the actor's hand as he stood by the paling. "Even the goats love me down here," said Mr. Gillette.

"He's hungry and wants to be fed," observed Broadhurst skeptically. There was silence for a second.

"Well, Broadhurst," Mr. Gillette went on after evident deliberation. "After a while you get to be so old you take even that feeling for love."

Augustus Thomas, who was seated next to Miss Lynn Fontanne, who was receiving on all sides congratulations on her engagement to Alfred Lunt.

"Miss Fontanne," Mr. Thomas began, "has just been telling me the manner in

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